

East Frederick Avenue Historic District

544 and 580 E. Frederick Avenue

Local ✓ 10/26/84
State
State Marker
National



Dunbar Hospital

Photograph by Daniel Hershberger, courtesy of National Park Service

Historic overview:

During the late nineteenth century, Frederick was considered a fashionable place to live, as it was only a few blocks from the mansions on Woodward. In the twentieth century, as wealthy families moved further from downtown, parts of the neighborhood became primarily black. WWI accelerated this process by encouraging thousands of blacks to move to Detroit and work in the war industries. Frederick Avenue was named for Frederick Farnsworth, a distinguished banker. He was son of Elon Farnsworth, a wealthy landowner, of whom Farnsworth Avenue was named. Frederick Farnsworth resided at 70 Frederick for two years.

In 1925, the Bertha Hansbury School opened at 544 Frederick. It was the first school in Detroit to bring black children and music teachers together in a classroom. A pianist of rare talent, Hansbury gave up a dream of becoming a concert pianist in favor of opening a music school. Along with many music courses, there were classes ranging from etiquette, history and interpretive dance. The school also contained a kindergarten and nursery, licensed by the state and accredited by the Detroit Board of Education.

Detroit's first black hospital was opened at 580 Frederick in 1919. The hospital was named in honor of the Ohio black poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Dunbar Hospital outgrew its Frederick Avenue location, and moved to Brush and Illinois and became known as Parkside Hospital. When Dunbar Hospital relocated, Charles Diggs, Sr. purchased the buildings. He was a successful businessman, and was later elected as Michigan's first black Democratic State Senator. Charles Diggs, Jr. was the first black member of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1954.

